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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001201

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: BAKASSI WITHDRAWAL AND REFUGEE ISSUES

REF: LAGOS 211

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

11. (C) Summary: On June 18, 2008, Polcouns and Poloff met with Tony Eze, Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) East and Central Africa Division, to discuss the MFA's views of the August 14 completion of Nigeria's withdrawal from the Bakassi peninsula. Eze affirmed the GON's overall commitment to meeting the terms of the 2006 Greentree Agreement, signed by former President Obasanjo, but voiced a great deal of frustration (from Nigeria's perspective) at Cameroon's handling of recent incidents of local violence, as well as its overall lack of cooperation in bilateral and regional matters. He also hinted that Nigeria may not remain committed to a date-specific total withdrawal if Cameroon continued to "violate" the terms of the Agreement. However, Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe told Ambassador June 15 that he expects Nigeria to honor its international commitments regarding this treaty, although he did express over the recent violence and attacks in Bakassi. An estimated 3000-4000 refugees have crossed into Cross River State, and State contacts there report they are in need of blankets, food, and medicine. End summary.

12. (C) In the June 18 meeting, MFA East and Central Africa Division Director Tony Eze told Poloffs that Nigeria was still committed to meeting the August 14 deadline for a complete Nigerian withdrawal from the Bakassi Peninsula. Nigeria's main concern at the moment is providing for refugees, he said, and the satisfactory resolution of humanitarian concerns (reftel). However, he described a great deal of Nigerian frustration over the Cameroonian government's handling of recent incidents of violence, as well as its general diplomatic stance toward Nigeria and what he characterized as its lack of willingness to cooperate on matters of both bilateral and regional interest.

13. (C) The June 15 attack on Cameroonian gendarmes, in which unknown militants killed at least six men and then reportedly mutilated their bodies, provoked reprisal attacks by gendarmes on Nigerians resident in northern Bakassi (reftel). Eze repeatedly contrasted the actions of these militants, who were "Nigeria's enemy too," with what he described as violent reprisals against ordinary Bakassi residents by Cameroonian security forces. According to press reports, thousands were driven from their homes, allegedly by gunfire and horsewhips, and there are reports of 3000-4000 displaced

persons now just outside Bakassi in Cross River State. Press reports also claim that 300 young men are still being held by Cameroonian authorities, and the peninsula is seeing a "heavy" build-up of Cameroonian military hardware, including gunboats, "flying boats," and armored vehicles. This "sacking", according to Eze, is a clear and egregious violation of the Greentree Agreement, and Eze warned that Nigeria "will not be at fault for changing its position if Cameroon continues to stir up public opinion against Greentree." But for now, he affirmed, Nigeria remains committed to Greentree, or else they would have already used the June 16 "sacking" as a pretext for withdrawal. He furthermore said that while former President Obasanjo committed an error by not involving the National Assembly early on, he doubted that any congressional vote of non-ratification would substantially affect the overall environment.

14. (C) Eze also said that, in a June 17 meeting with Cameroonian High Commissioner David Sinou, Foreign Minister Maduekwe insisted that incidents such as the June 15 attack should be handled "in a friendly manner;" further talks are planned in the near future. Eze said that President Yar'Adua may appoint a special envoy to Cameroon to help deal with future anticipated problems, and that Nigeria has been making attempts for some time to revive the "Joint Commission," which met every two years to discuss Bakassi-related issues. With the last meeting having taken place in 2002, Nigeria has been pressing for a June 2008 meeting; Cameroon, however, has refused to agree to this, and has only said it might agree to an August meeting after the final handover is complete.

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(Note: Post has since confirmed that the latest meeting of the Cameroon/Nigeria Mixed Commission, chaired by UN Secretary General's Special Representative Amb. Said Djinnit, was actually in session at the very moment Poloffs were speaking to Eze, eroding Eze's credibility. End note.) A possible solution to security problems, Eze said, would be joint military patrols, similar to those Nigeria already conducts with Equatorial Guinea.

15. (C) On June 16, acting Lagos Consul General spoke with Kasmir Obok, Special Assistant for Special Duties to the Governor of Cross River State, as he was returning from the Peninsula with the Governor. Obok confirmed that the number of refugees exceeded 3000, and that the refugees needed blankets, food, and medicines. Other contacts reported similar numbers of refugees, but noted that there were no young men in the group, because Cameroonian gendarmes have them under house arrest in the villages, and did not allow them to accompany the women, children, and elderly men who fled the area.

16. (C) Comment: Some press editorials question the wisdom of having submitted the Bakassi issue to the International Court of Justice in the first place, and several headlines scream out real and alleged abuses against Nigerians in Bakassi. Cameroonian gendarmes are said to have "overrun" the peninsula, militants only killed the gendarmes in self-defense, and the "battle of Bakassi is not yet over." The National Assembly has called the Greentree Agreement illegal, citing the Constitutional requirement that all treaties be ratified by the Senate, and it is easy to conflate anti-Greentree sentiment into the anti-Obasanjo backlash popular in some political quarters.

16. (C) Comment continued: It is unclear how much Eze's comments represent the views of the Foreign Minister. However, if violence continues in the region, there could be stronger calls from the press, the general public, and the National Assembly for a more vigorous defense of the rights and welfare of Nigerians in Bakassi. Post will continue to monitor the situation. End Comment.

SANDERS